Latomie; closed gardens; caves; orchards in a deep quarry; delicate trickling of the fountain of Venus; liana. This is where prisoners were locked up, in these abandoned quarries. The thick, heavy, moist air was horribly loaded with the scent of orange-flowers. We bit into not quite ripe lemons; the first unbearably acid taste gradually disappeared, leaving only an unbelievably delicate perfume in the mouth. This is a scene of rape, of murder, of abominable passion, one of those subterranean gardens of which Arabian tales speak, in which Aladdin seeks fruits that are precious stones, where the Calender's cousin shuts himself up with his sister and mistress, where the wife of the King of the Islands joins at night the wounded black slave whom her enchantments keep from dying.

Greek theater seen at night at the hour when the moon rises. Above it is the avenue of tombs leading to fields of asphodels. I have never seen anything more silent.

II

February-March

In the autumn, three years ago, our arrival in Tunis was marvelous. Although already considerably spoiled by the wide boulevards cutting through it, it was still a classic and beautiful city, harmoniously uniform, whose whitewashed houses seemed to light up from within at night like alabaster lamps.

As soon as you left the French port, not a single tree was to be seen; you sought out the shade of the souks, those great covered market-places, vaulted over or covered with cloth or planks. They received only a reflected light that filled them with a special atmosphere; these souks seemed a second underground city within the city, about as large as a third of Tunis. From the terrace where Paul Laurens used to go to

paint, you could see from there to the sea only a broken stairway, white terraces cut by courtyards like ditches, in which the boredom of the women languished. In the evening all the white was mauve and the sky was the color of a tea rose; in the morning the white became pink against a pale-purple sky. But after the winter rains the walls have a green mantle, for mosses cover them, and the edge of the terraces looks like the edge of a basket of flowers,

I missed the white, serious, classic Tunis of that autumn, which made me think, as I wandered through its regular streets in the evening, of the Helen of Part II of *Faust,* or of Psyche, "the agate lamp in her hand/* wandering in an avenue of tombs,

Trees are being planted now on the wide streets and squares. Tunis will be more charming as a result, but nothing could disfigure it more.